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Letter dated 25 October 2004 from the Permanent Representative of the Sudan to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

On 21 October 2004, the Darfur rebels attacked a convoy of 105 Nigerian pilgrims who were crossing the Sudan by road on their way to Mecca. In this regard, I have the honour to enclose herewith the communiqué issued by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (see annex).

I would highly appreciate it if you could circulate the present letter and its annex as a document of the Security Council.

(*Signed*) Elfatih **Erwa**
Permanent Representative

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Annex to the letter dated 25 October 2004 from the Permanent Representative of the Sudan to the United Nations addressed to the President of the Security Council

[Original: Arabic]

Communiqué on the attack by Darfur rebels on Nigerian pilgrims

On 21 October 2004, a convoy of 105 Nigerian pilgrims and 15 Sudanese citizens was attacked by rebel forces in Khor-Tawilah, North Darfur state, while transiting through the Sudan en route to the holy sites. In addition to seizing three cars, the rebel forces robbed the convoy members of their entire possessions and money. Having been stripped of all their belongings and subjected to intimidation and ill-treatment, the pilgrims were then bundled into a car heading in the direction of El Fasher.

The Government of the Sudan vigorously condemns this attack, which showed no regard for the sanctity of pilgrims bound for the Kaaba during the Holy Month, and wishes to state that the Sudan has, for centuries, been happy for thousands of pilgrims from West Africa to transit its territory each year on their journey of pilgrimage. Throughout that time, no pilgrims have ever come under any such attack; on the contrary, they have invariably received a hospitable welcome from their fellow Sudanese brothers. Over generations, the sacred journey of pilgrimage has come to embody one of the most distinguished ties of brotherhood and affection. Moreover, it has formed a bridge for the finest form of cultural and social communication among the peoples of West Africa and the Sudan.

This grave attack represents a serious and dangerous violation of the ceasefire agreement and furthermore indicates a lack of any sense of responsibility on the part of the rebels, who deliberately looted the possessions of those pilgrims, robbed them of their money and vehicles and exposed them to the greatest of dangers.

The Government of the Sudan clearly and unequivocally affirms that it holds the rebels fully responsible for this vile crime and demands that they should take immediate action to return, in full and as soon as possible, the looted money and possessions to their owners. The Government also demands that the rebels should make a clear and public apology to those pilgrims for the suffering which they inflicted on them, as well as to all pilgrims to the Kaaba and all Muslims whose feelings have been hurt by this evil attack on their fellow Nigerian pilgrims.

The Government further demands the immediate release of the 15 Sudanese citizens and holds the rebels fully responsible for such fate as may befall any one of them.

In view of the grave dangers represented by this attack on pilgrims crossing the Sudan, the Government of Sudan finds itself compelled to issue a firm and explicit warning to the rebels to desist fully from repeating such criminal and reprehensible acts.

For its part, the Government of the Sudan will take every measure to guarantee the safety of all its citizens and of foreigners in or transiting its territory.

It will also endeavour to make the requisite arrangements, in collaboration with the mission of the African Union (which was immediately notified of this violation), for monitoring such transgression and attacks, holding the rebels accountable therefor and taking such action as is necessary to prevent any recurrence.

In conclusion, the Government of the Sudan reiterates its sense of sorrow at the rebel involvement in this incident, concerning which it wishes to affirm to its fellow Nigerian and other pilgrims transiting the Sudan its deep regret. It also assures them that the Government and people of the Sudan are keen not only to ensure their safety and security, but also to welcome them as noble brothers in their blessed journey to the holy sites.